1: Hart & Pilling E-5 (1928-1954) 1960
OI20 Tiwi OI20

I

Tiwi Marriage

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Cultural Isolation

PEOPLE WHO LIVE in the congested cities and towns of the modern world have difficulty in realizing how different life can be at the hunting and gathering level of human existence. The basic fact about the life of hunters and gatherers is the thinly spread-out manner in which they live and the isolation of families and households from each other. In the case of the Tiwi, these conditions of isolation and dispersal were accentuated by their island habitat. Melville and Bathurst Islands lie off the northern coast of Australia some fifty to eighty miles from Darwin, which is the administrative capital of the empty north. They are separated from the mainland by about twenty-five miles of open sea at the narrowest part. This distance is slightly greater than the distance that separates England from France at the Straits of Dover, and just as the dim outline of coastal France can be seen from England on clear days, so the dim outline of the Australian mainland can be seen from the southern edges of the islands. However, Tiwi tradition is firm and certain that before the white man's arrival there was no contact between the islands and the mainland. To them, the dimly seen coastline of Australia was *Tibambinumi*, the home of the dead, to which all Tiwi souls went after death. It follows from this they they regarded the inhabited world as composed of their own two islands, and on those islands they lived a self-contained and exclusive existence. Occasionally outsiders appeared, either castaways from surrounding areas, including presumably the Australian mainland, and in recent centuries, fishing boats and pirates from Indonesia, loosely called "Malays" in the literature. To such visitors from outside, the Tiwi were consistently and implacably hostile. Their own traditions and what little written history there is of "Malay" penetration into the Arafura Sea both tell the same story. Outsiders who landed on the islands were massacred or vigorously resisted. Whether they were classified as *Malai-ui* ("Malays") or *Wona-ui*

1: Hart & Pilling E-5 (1928-1954) 1960
OI20 Tiwi OI20

Tiklauila" or "My wife is a Munupula woman"; a mourner would say, "He died when visiting the Munupula and therefore we will have to go to Munupi for the funeral"; an old man would reminisce about being brought up as a youth by his mother's brother, who was a Turupula, and the good times he had in Turupi; and another would recount details of big battles between the Munupula and the Malauila. All of these were band names or band territories. The nine bands thus acted, psychologically, as small tribelets or semisovereign groups, since it was with one of them that every Tiwi most closely identified in his day-to-day life on the islands. It is only when, as nowadays, he leaves the islands to go to work for the white man in Darwin that he has to think of himself as a Tiwi, since there he mingles with men of other tribes. Even then, work and residence in the white man's town does not entirely obliterate band identification. A Tiklauila in Darwin prefers to work with and to consort in the evenings with other Tiklauila, and Malauila with Malauila.[8]

Because of certain peculiar features of Tiwi domestic life, to be discussed below, it is difficult to sum up the Tiwi band in any simple formula. People, especially women, changed their band residence frequently in the course of their lives, and being born into a band did not at all require permanent residence with that band, either for males or for females. Thus the district (for example, Tiklaru or Malau) was a firm, fixed, known quantity, but the people who "owned" the district (for example, Tiklauila or Malauila) were a flexible and constantly shifting collection of individuals.

The territorial boundaries between bands were clear and well known to everybody, though they were not the sharp lines on a map such as we regard as essential for a frontier or a land boundary. All pieces of country—clumps of jungle, stretches of grassland, sections of thick woods—had names. One such piece of country, say a thickly wooded area, belonged to one band, while the more open country that began where the woods thinned out belonged to another; thus the boundary was not a sharp line but a transitional zone—perhaps of several miles—where the change from trees to open savannah became noticeable, with the band territories thus fusing into one another rather than being separated by sharp lines. The Tiwi, so to speak, thought of the landscape as a sort of spectrum where a man moved gradually out of one district into another as he passed from one type of horizon to the next. Since rivers, and even Apsley Strait, a very narrow arm of the sea separating Melville from Bathurst Island, usually have similar types of vegetation on *both* sides or banks, none of the island rivers nor Apsley Strait was a boundary or frontier between bands. The Mandiimbula, predominantly a Melville Island

[8] In the early 1930's the situation at the Government Hospital in Darwin offered a good illustration of this. The hospital authorities said they gave preference for houseboy jobs to "Melville Islanders because of their greater intelligence and reliability." In point of fact, some of the younger Tiklauila had established a monopoly on hospital jobs and no Tiwi other than a Tiklauila was ever hired there. The whites thought they were hiring Tiwi but the Tiklauila saw to it that they hired only Tiklauila and felt no vestige of obligation to other Tiwi to help them get these desirable jobs. The alleged greater intelligence of the islanders was undoubtedly due to the fact that the Tiklauila, having had a Catholic mission in their territory since 1911, were more used to white requirements.

2: Mountford E-5 (1954) 1958
O120 Tiwi O120

773 [372] Puzzled over this new phenomenon, *Jurumu* placed the smouldering wood-dust into the pith of a dead pandanus palm and blew upon it. To the surprise of both men the speck became larger and larger, finally bursting into a flame. This frightened the men so badly that they rushed to *Purukupali* and asked him to destroy the strange thing they had made. But when *Purukupali* saw the blazing wood and felt its heat he realized that *Jurumu* and *Mudati* had inadvertently discovered something that would give the aborigines not only light to dispel the darkness, but heat to cook their food and to keep them warm.[16]

Calling his sister, *Wuriupranala*, he gave her a torch of bark lit from the blazing log and told her that it was her duty to keep it alight always. *Tjapara*, [821] who later became the moon, was given a smaller torch.

With the coming of light and heat, the descendants of *Mudungkala* spread over the island, hunting and camping in places which, at the close of the creation period, became their totemic country.

About that time, two men, *Puruti* and *Jirakati*, were spearing fish in Tiaupu, a freshwater swamp at Piper Head, near the northern entrance to Apsley Straits, when they noticed, by the movements of the stems of the water-lilies, some large creature moving about under the water.

Not knowing it was his mother, *Tipuru-undunga*, *Puruti* speared her in the neck. Screaming with pain and urinating in her fright, *Tipuru-undunga* [823] rushed into the sea, which in those days was fresh water, polluting it so much with her blood and urine that it became as salt as the sea of today.

The wounded *Tipuru-undunga* changed herself into the tall, stately bird, [825] the jabiru (*Xenorhynchus asiaticus*) which now lives on the edge of the fresh-water lagoons; while the fishermen, *Puruti* and *Jirakati* became the sea-osprey (*Pandion haliaetus*) and the graceful white-headed sea-eagle (*Haliaetus leucogaster*).[16]

During those early *palaneri* times, a man, *Jirakupai*, lived beside a fresh-water lagoon, *Jiriringa*, near Cape Fourcroy, south-western Bathurst Island. He had married two sisters, *Kuraruna* and *Jakuia*.

Jirakupai was an expert in the making of both the large many-barbed, male [411] spears, *tunkaringa*, which have a row of barbs on one side (Pl. 32A), and the female spears, *tunkaguni*, with their double row of barbs (Pl. 32B). Both forms are now used in the *pukamuni* rituals.

[15] The aborigines distinguish between light (*milafuka*) from the sun or burning wood, and heat (*ikwani*) from glowing coals.

[16] The large hawk-like birds, *Jirakati*, the sea-eagle, *Puruti*, the sea-osprey, and *Mudati*, the fork-tailed kite, appear as men in a number of the myths. In each one they transformed themselves from men into birds.

2: Mountford E-5 (1954) 1958
OI20 Tiwi OI20

Still railing, *Purukupali* picked up the dead body of his son, which *Bima* had wrapped in a sheet of paper-bark, and walking backward into the sea, called out loudly as the waters closed over his head,

Maulantanili awangtini tangini mu mu.

(You must all follow me; as I die, so must you all die.)

The place where *Purukupali* died, adjacent to Impanali, on the east coast of Melville Island, became a whirlpool so strong that any aboriginal who approached it in a canoe would be drowned. When *Tjapara* saw what had happened, he changed himself into the moon. But he did not entirely escape the decree of *Purukupali*, for, even though *Tjapara* is eternally reincarnated, he has to die for three days. On any clear night, one can see on the face of the moon-man the wounds which he received in his fight with *Purukupali* so long ago.

One bark painting, Pl. 28, c, deals with the death of *Purukupali* and his son *Djinini*. At *a*, is the whirlpool off Impanali Point, eastern Melville Island, where *Purukupali*, *b*, carrying his dead son, disappeared beneath the surface of the water.

The foot-marks of *Purukupali*, as he walked backward into the water, are the white dots at *c*; his arms, the two white bars, at *d*; and the dead child he carried is at *e*. The moon-man, *Tjapara*, at *f*, is asking for the body of the dead child to restore him to life.

The moon in the sky is shown at *g*; the forked throwing stick, *mihuanta* at *h*; and at *j* are the plain throwing sticks, *muruguna*, which when thrown by *Purukupali*, caused the wounds on the face of *Tjapara*.

At *l*, *l*, are the goose-feather balls, *tokwianga* (Pl. 31B), of *Purukupali*; *n*, *n*, his cane armlets, *jairinis* (Pl. 31H); *s* (upper left) is his cockatoo-feather head ornament, *primitiki*; *k*, *k*, are his bark baskets, *wanatuna*; *u*, his firesticks; *o*, is his camp fire; and *r*, his water-hole.

Tjapara's fireplace, an unlocalized spot, *Oulini*, in the sky, is at *q*; his camp-fire is at *p*, and his firestick at *t*.

4. THE PUKAMUNI OF PURUKUPALI

When *Tukimbini*, who was living at Murupianga, heard of the death of *Purukupali*, he sent a message stick to *Talinini* of the honey-people of central Bathurst Island, appointing him the ceremonial leader (*alawuia*) of the burial rituals.

At the same time, because they were near at hand, he told the people who lived at Murupianga, Wuriupi and Wailu, that as they were the appointed

2: Mountford E-5 (1954) 1958
O120 Tiwi O120

The *pukamuni* poles, *tudinis*, *a*, *a*, etc., and *b*, *b*, etc., are now parallel reefs of stone[99] on the sea-coast at Impanali; circle *d*, is a ring of white sand encircling the death place of *Purukupali*; and *e*, a large boulder at Tapararimi, once a stone axe, which the "workers" had used to cut the *pukamuni* poles.

The remainder of the designs on the painting symbolize the people of creation times mourning for *Purukupali*. The dots *j*, *j*, on the ground of the painting, represent the coloured ochres on the body of the ceremonial leader, *Talinini*; the black rectangle, *g*, *Waia*, the mother-in-law of *Purukupali*; and *h*, *h*, two bird-women, *Pungatili* and *Makungdili*.

At *k* (left) is a honey-woman, *Imbara*, the sister of *Talinini*; *l* (upper left), her mother, *Latungkala*, who made a bark basket, and *m*, another honey-woman, *Irama*. *Mauwini* is at *n*, he, with *Talinini* and *Taparalili*, performed the first *ilania* at Biawururu, on central Bathurst Island. *Taparalili* is at *q*, and other honey-men, *Tupiringini* and *Maipuringa* are at *p* and *s*.

On Pl. 3C, the artist tried to show some of the decorations used in a *pukamuni* ceremony. The series of cross-hatched, more or less rectangular panels, at the top, represent the painted bark baskets which are left on the grave; the vertical panels at the bottom, lines of colour in the hair of the performers, and the groups of chevron designs, the scars on the bodies of the men and women. The horizontal band across the centre of the painting represents the hair belts of the men.

Pl. 3D and 3E are designs which, the artists told me, would be similar to those painted on the burial poles of *Purukupali*.

The artist of Pl. 3D did not give me the meaning of his design, but on Pl. 3E, the four barred panels, *a*, *a*, etc., represent native roads; the plain bands, *b*, *b*, etc., on either side, horizontal lines of clouds, the diagonal bands, in the upper and lower panels, native fig trees, and the cross-hatched diamond-shaped panels, spider webs on the trees.

Before the rituals at Tapararimi began, the fish-men engaged in a contest to prove who could throw their spears the furthest. *Pipinjawari* was the most skilled of them all, for, even though he stood behind the others, his spears still travelled the greatest distance. Wherever the spears landed, there are now large eucalyptus trees, the largest of them, called *Warukumbi*, being once the spear of *Pipinjawari*. But in winning the contest, the fish-man strained his spine so badly that parts of the vertebrae were forced through the skin.

At the conclusion of the rituals, it was the duty of *Pipinjawari* to pay the "workers" for the labour of cutting and painting the poles, and for making

[99] Other informants state they are large trees. Probably both informants are correct.

2: Mountford E-5 (1954) 1958
OI20 Tiwi OI20

4. THE SEA-DOGS, THE WANKUIS

773 A fragment of a myth tells of how, at the close of the creation period, a mythical man, called *Kirinua*, assembled all the dogs and asked them whether they would prefer to live on the land or in the sea. The present-day dingos, the *Kirijunas*, chose the land, and others, the sea-dogs, *Wankuis*, the sandbanks in the sea.

776 The home of one group of the sea-dogs is a long sand-bar on the eastern side of the entrance to Snake Bay, about a mile from the expedition camp, over which, except at the spring tides, the waves break continuously.
● [823] The aborigines look on the breaking waves as the wagging tails of the *Wankuis*.

When the tide is out in the day-time and the sandbank exposed and dry, the sea-dogs, to escape being seen go to their camps under the sand.

When it is dark, the *Wankuis* leave their watery home, come on shore and make their camps in low caves at the base of a cliff at Snake Bay (Pl. 47E). While there, the *Wankuis* capture the sea-foods of the shallow waters, sting-rays, shell-fish and crabs. The aborigines claim that on the still nights they often hear the *Wankuis* barking.

In the shallow waters of a sandbar near Cape Fourcroy, the aborigines frequently see another kind of *Wankui* which walks on three legs, waving the fourth in the air.

x532 Pl. 47D pictures the *Wankuis* at the sandbar in Snake Bay. In the centre,
776 with many teats, is the mother surrounded by her twelve sons. It is significant that there was no mention of the father.

5. THE RAINBOW, MARATJI

171 A belief in a mythical serpent-like creature, which is associated with, or is,
776 the rainbow, and is dangerous to strangers, but not to the local inhabitants,
[821] occupies an important place, not only in the mythology of the Australian aborigines, but in the mythologies of people in many parts of the world. These mythical creatures are usually highly-coloured (like the rainbow), of huge size and have both mane and beard.

I have traced these mythical creatures, in their various forms, from the River Murray in South Australia, through Central Australia to Arnhem Land. In the western deserts of Central Australia, Mountford, 1948, p. 138, writes, "The snake (*wonambi*) is a huge, many-coloured creature with a
[778] mane and a beard. It is feared . . . because it attacks all strangers who approach

12:Goodale E-5 (1954) 1957 O120 Tiwi O120

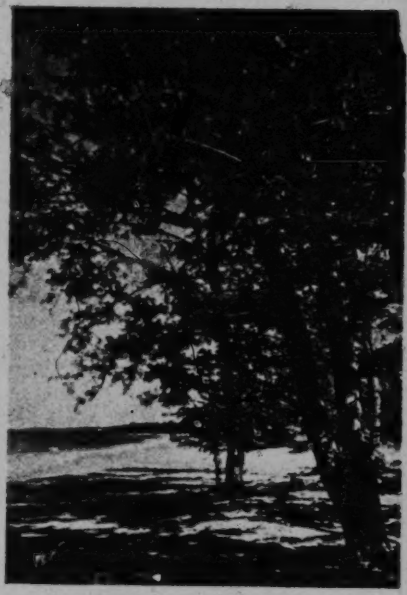

Fig. 4. A casuarina grove

123 clutched Tchuwiunga more tightly
501 and I hugged my KLM bag while the two men worked to head the canoe into the largest waves while trying at the same time to head in [137] towards the shore. This meant taking a good many not so large waves broadside and we got very wet. Facing sternwards, I could not see the waves, so if a particularly [823] large one (Agnes called them "female waves!") approached, I would be given a few seconds warning and would duck the breaking spray which would cover the boat and its occupants. The only miserable one was the puppy who presented a very puzzled and hurt expression as he peered out from under the folds of Agnes's *naga*. For the rest of us the cold spray was a welcome relief from the burning sun.

Once in close to the shore, our skilful paddlers brought the canoe safely onto the beach, riding in on one of the breakers. We unloaded everything, although we intended to stop only for lunch, for the canoe would soon be swamped by the sea if left alone. After unloading, Albert swam the canoe out beyond the breakers where he anchored it with a large rock.

123 Then we climbed the low dunes close to the shore and came to a grove of casuarinas. These provided much appreciated shade but a very uncomfortable carpet of spiny seed pods. Taking up our two billy cans, Agnes led me to the back of the grove where she [312] showed me a small well. There were many footprints around the sandy hole which were identified as belonging to Black Joe's mob, the natives who had preceded us. They had, however, not depleted the well for in the bottom was a small puddle, and since this was at the very end of the six months dry season, it was considered fortunate that there was any water at all. Agnes carefully tasted